

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

Disappointment with the result of the Russo-Finnish war has found expression in a demand in certain quarters in both France and this country not only that the war should be prosecuted with greater vigour, but that the enemy should be paid back in their own coin.

A recent article in the *Temps* urges that the Allies should not hesitate to dispel diplomatic fictions, and to persuade neutrals that neither juridical nor moral considerations need prevent a belligerent from having recourse to all the arms used by the adversary.

Sir Warren Fisher, the North-Western Regional Commissioner, in a speech a few days ago, as reported in *The Times*, said that this war was a war of religion, and that unless we were as convinced of the truth of the principles underlying the Sermon on the Mount as were the Prussians about their own doctrine of brutality, bullying, fraud and cunning, we doomed ourselves to failure. The Germans were the foulest and dirtiest fighters, and if we were to deal with them we must give them hell in every sort of way. Large and frequent doses of their own medicine were essential if we were to make any impression on them.

The suggestion that the British are by nature exponents of the Sermon on the Mount is on a par with the claim that they are a striking illustration of the promise that the meek shall inherit the earth; and the suggestion that its principles may be enforced or defended by the methods attributed to the Germans reminds one of the man who took down from the wall a heavily framed, illuminated motto "God bless our home" and hit his wife over the head with it.

The Allies certainly cannot allow Germany to run riot without recourse to counter measures. The vital distinction is whether these measures are decided on from a vindictive desire to repay the Germans in their own coin, or as a necessary means of restraining and defeating the madness which is destroying civilisation. The Government must be urged to hold strictly to its declared intention of pursuing military objectives and refraining from measures designed to terrorise civilian populations.

A CHOICE BETWEEN THREE COURSES

Three choices lie before this country, and everything depends on the definiteness and firmness with which the choice is made.

(1) It is possible to seek an immediate peace. That can only mean a peace on Hitler's terms, or on conditions which will almost certainly lead either to a renewal of the conflict in the near future or to the extension of pagan tyranny throughout the world.

(2) We may allow ourselves to be dragged down to the level of the evil thing we are fighting. In that case there will be nothing left that is worth fighting for. Whoever wins, the Nazi spirit will have triumphed. We cannot for months or years lay aside every restraint of morality and also have at our disposal the moral resources to

make a creative peace when the time comes. This is just as impossible as to eat a cake and keep it.

Moreover, to imitate the policy of our opponents would inevitably forfeit the sympathy of the neutrals. Why should they prefer our cause if we are not standing for higher principles? The Stockholm paper *Social-Democraten* wrote a few days ago: "Do the Germans fail to realise that the Western Powers if they were willing to pursue the same policy of brutal assault as the dictator States could obtain their objectives with the same amount of 'success' as the dictatorships? Why is it that the Western Powers do not wish to employ the methods of the dictators? Perhaps it is because those 'nonentities,' who direct the policy of the great democracies, think that in the long run it is better to acquire friends than to create enemies all round and govern through fear."

(3) The third course is to see to it that the feelings of horror aroused by the conduct of our enemies drive us, not to panic and retaliation, but to a deeper devotion to the ends for which we entered the war. We can make, and insistently repeat, a declaration of our policy and purpose adequate to the demands of the total situation. We can appeal continuously to the desire in the hearts of plain men everywhere for justice, security and community. But we must face the fact that the effect of such declarations will depend on our ability to demonstrate by our *acts* the direction in which we intend to move. Our policy both at home and abroad has been too much infected by materialistic ends for our professions to carry sufficient conviction. There is no way out, if the nation lacks the imagination and moral energy to adopt and carry out a policy of this nature.

The moral conversion that is essential must begin immediately. It is vain to devote our main energies to plans for the peace settlement and reconstruction when the war is over. It is an inescapable truth that what is possible when the war comes to an end will depend on what we do now. There is no cutting ourselves out from the stream of history and re-entering it at some future date. Both the possibilities of reconstruction that will be open to us when the war is over and our own moral capacity to turn them to account will be determined by our present actions. This truth is of such crucial importance that I propose to devote an early supplement to its fuller exposition.

JEWS, CHRISTIANS AND REFUGEES

I have a letter from a distinguished scholar with exceptional knowledge of the subject about which he writes, who tells me—quite justly—that my reference to the attitudes of Christians and Jews to the refugee problem in C.N.L. No. 19 was an understatement.

The facts are that for nearly six years the Jewish community in this country, constituting only three-quarters of one per cent. of the population, supported not only the 80 per cent. of the refugees who were Jewish, but the 20 per cent. who were not. The 99 per cent. of the population who are nominally Christian did practically nothing for the 20 per cent. of the refugees who were nominally Christian.

"Moreover, for four years," the writer continues, "even the declared anti-Christian policy of the Nazis did not lead the official leaders of the Churches to draw serious attention to the refugee problem. They failed to respond effectively until it became abundantly clear that the Churches were themselves in grave danger.

"The only parts of us which, beyond all question and argument, are certainly immortal, are our acts, though memories are mercifully—almost comically—short. Nevertheless, what has been has been. Nothing is gained by harping on this, but I would beseech you not even to seem to gloss the episode itself. There are many and

deep reasons why it should not be belittled. Nor can a few gentle and kindly words in a Jewish paper alter or expunge an ineluctable historic sequence."

Efforts were made in the end to redress the wrong. Through the vigorous action of the Bishop of Chichester a sum of £50,000 was provided from Church of England sources. The Christian Council for Refugees co-operated actively in the raising of the Baldwin Fund amounting to half a million pounds, and as stated in the earlier letter, gave important help in obtaining from the government a grant equal in amount to the contributions made by voluntary agencies. But nothing can alter the historical fact of the failure in imagination and sympathy of British Christianity.

PROFESSOR CLARKE AND MR. T. S. ELIOT

Professor Clarke has written to express his warm appreciation of the Supplement by Mr. T. S. Eliot a fortnight ago. In regard to Mr. Eliot's comment on his own little book *Education and Social Change* (Sheldon Press 1s.) he says:

"I am, perhaps, justified in pointing out that in writing it I was doing no more than the humble and necessary office of a batman who had been instructed to tidy up the equipment in preparation for an adventurous journey.

"No one is better qualified than Mr. Eliot to indicate the direction in which we have to travel, and if he argues that, before we have journeyed very far along the road, we shall find good reason to re-survey the equipment and perhaps discard a good deal of it, I am disposed to disagree with him. Discussions of religious education, for instance, which appear to presuppose the unbroken continuance of an old institutional order, and even to be almost as much concerned with its maintenance as with religious education itself, do not seem to me to be very helpful.

"But there *is* an institutional order now existing to serve the purposes of education, and we shall have to take account of it in any effort to achieve the values which Mr. Eliot has defined for us. My concern — a limited one — was with the institutional order, and the brief reference to 'charismatic' education occurred in the historical section of my book, where I was trying to indicate some of the factors by which the educational institutions of this country have been shaped. I did not venture to be prophetic except in a brief hint at the end of the book.

"If I may be allowed to regard Mr. Eliot's letter as a development of that hint — as for me it is — I am all the more grateful to him for it. The issues he raises have long been troubling the minds of many who realise that mere extension of opportunity, taken by itself, may only increase futility and disintegration.

"The task before us will call for much division of labour. There will be work, like the preparation of my little book, to keep many of us busy in the kitchen. It would be a little hard on such Marthas if, for that reason, they came to be identified with a particularly reprobate remark of the Falstaff whom Mr. Eliot cites so happily: 'And I have not forgotten what the inside of a church is made of, I am a peppercorn, a brewer's horse!'"

Your sincerely,

H. De laan

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WHAT CAN WE DO?

The asking of this question in a recent number of the News-Letter has brought the following letter from a vicar in the North of England:—

"Possibly what one man has tried to do during the last six months may be of some help to others. The writer left school in 1916 to serve for the rest of the last war as a subaltern in the artillery in France. During the past twenty years he has been in turn soldier, social worker, politician, city councillor and clergyman.

"I have learned that if I try to live creatively in the farthest extremity of my faith, and if I put all my resources at God's disposal, fear takes its proper place as caution and concrete problems of men and money have a way of solving themselves.

"We had an example of this soon after war broke out. My church had accumulated a debt of £250. We had planned to try to pay it off with a gift day—a new experience for this parish. Some timid people had urged its abandonment under war conditions; but faith and courage prevailed. We went ahead, and on one day raised £253. Ever since there has been a steady growth in enterprise, in interest, in voluntary service, and in giving among the parishioners.

"But I also felt that in war-time a parish priest had duties of service in the wider community for which his parishioners could spare him with gain to their own spiritual lives. It was clear that in all aspects of life the chief need was for leadership. It was necessary to make every effort to get to know the facts of any chosen situation, then to gather a team of people who could influence these facts in a Christian direction, and to get them into action with the minimum of waste talk.

"As an incumbent of a housing estate, I had long been interested in the difficulties of working-class adolescents, and had tried to get to know and to meet some of the needs of a few of them. It was clear that these needs were going to be greatly intensified in war-time, but it was also clear that now was the chance for big social experiments.

"With others I decided to try to give a lead to efforts to work out on a city scale some of the discoveries and methods which we had

tried locally. We determined to attempt to get educationists, social workers, industrialists, clergy and others to combine to face the needs of adolescents as a whole instead of piecemeal and in isolation. Much has happened as a result. Surveys have been made, a leaders training conference has been held, two salaried workers have been appointed, the outline of a short-term and a long-term programme is beginning to emerge. The man-power and the money have always been forthcoming immediately after the decision to take each next step forward in faith.

"What we are attempting to tackle in one sphere of the life of one city can be, and no doubt is, being tackled much more effectively by many others elsewhere in the same and in other spheres of work. I am, however, writing to help those who have not yet got going, and I wish to make the point that everywhere there are opportunities for service—evacuation, billeting, troop concentrations, A.R.P. All those and many others should, in the words of the C.N.-L., be regarded 'not as a disaster to be palliated, but as an opportunity to be taken.'

"Finally, for myself I have found the following general principles to be of value:—

"(1) To start each day on my knees with the dedication of my life to God.

"(2) To put all resources of time, money, home, energy, at God's disposal.

"(3) To try to think as honestly and as humbly as possible; to learn from everybody and to remember that there is always an element of truth in the opposite of those things in which we believe.

"(4) Once a line of action is clear, to act decisively and courageously and not to mind the consequences.

"(5) To attend to detail.

"(6) To care for the team.

"(7) Never to give up; to examine every defeat and failure for the seeds of victory which it contains.

"(8) Not to waste time criticising other people.

"(9) To co-ordinate all work with that of others in the same field."

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CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

By A MEMBER OF A TRIBUNAL

The attitude of the pacifist and the conscientious objector has already been a good deal discussed in the Christian News-Letter, but mainly from an abstract or theoretical point of view. It may be of interest to its readers to hear how the problem presents itself in working to the tribunals appointed to hear applications under the National Service (Armed Forces) Act, 1939, to be placed on the register of conscientious objectors.

CHANGE IN PUBLIC OPINION

In the last war the general attitude to the conscientious objector was hostile and, with the exception of the members of certain religious sects, he was regarded as something approaching a felon or a criminal; not a few were imprisoned. There has been since then an undoubted change of public opinion. Freedom of thought and opinion is one of the watchwords of British democracy, and freedom of action based on genuine conviction in regard to military service has now been recognised by the Government. Both the National Service Act and before it the Military Training Act of March, 1939, made special provision for the conscientious objectors and directed the Minister of Labour to appoint tribunals to hear their appeals. This is a great advance which fully reflects the spirit in which Great Britain is fighting the present war. It is significant of this spirit that two young men who were joining the forces have independently expressed to the present writer their satisfaction at the existence of the tribunals: "for this," they

said, (freedom of opinion) "is only what we are fighting for."

PROVISIONS OF THE ACT

To make the situation clear it is necessary to explain shortly the provisions of the Act and the powers of the tribunals. An applicant to be placed on the C.O. register can claim that he conscientiously objects (a) to being registered in the military service register, (b) to performing military service, or (c) to performing combatant duties. The tribunal, if it is satisfied as regards the conscientious nature of the objection, can give three corresponding decisions. If the objection is only to (c) it can order that the applicant be transferred to the military service register for non-combatant duties only, and a special clause of the Act protects him from being assigned combatant duties, as was occasionally done under the pressure of events during the last war. If the objection is under (b), i.e., to coming under military control at all, whether in the combatant or non-combatant forces, the tribunal may direct that he shall be registered in the register of conscientious objectors *conditionally*, the condition being that until the end of the present emergency he must undertake work specified by the tribunal of a civil character under civil control, and, if directed by the Minister, undergo training to fit him for such work. Objection (a) is more difficult to interpret, but it applies to those extreme cases in which the applicant conscientiously objects even to undertaking civilian work on the

grounds either that such work would directly or indirectly assist the "war-effort," or that it would be inconsistent with his conscience to accept an order made by the tribunal under an Act directed to military ends. In such cases the tribunal is empowered to order that the applicant be placed on the register of conscientious objectors without condition.

There is little doubt from the reports which have appeared in the newspapers that not all the eleven tribunals have interpreted their duties in the same way, and it is to be regretted that the Chairmen were not summoned to meet together before proceedings began to discuss the administration of the Act. This would undoubtedly have resulted in greater uniformity. For instance, the tribunal of which I am a member decided at once that it was not the duty of the tribunal to argue with an applicant with a view to showing him that his attitude was mistaken, but only to ask such questions as would enable it to decide whether the objection was or was not conscientiously held. But this view does not seem to have been held by all the tribunals.

THE MEANING OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

Perhaps the most difficult preliminary duty of a tribunal was to make up its mind what constituted a "conscientious objection"; it is from its nature very difficult to define. It was, however, agreed by the tribunal in question to take as a rough guide the definition "an objection based on religious or moral convictions honestly held," and this understanding has worked satisfactorily.

RELIGIOUS GROUNDS

The great majority of the applicants base their objections on religious grounds, many on a simple-hearted fundamentalist interpretation of certain biblical texts, "Thou shalt not kill," "Love your

enemies," "Put up thy sword," and so on, which are quoted again and again. Others rest their claim on a broader general interpretation of Christian ethics. But within this general agreement there are many varieties of opinion, and widely differing degrees of objection to which they give rise.

The position of the "Friends" is well known, and they have generously opened their ambulance units to many outside their own body. Many religious bodies, such as the "Brethren," the "Christadelphians," and the "International Bible Students" or "Jehovah's Witnesses"—a much larger body than one would suppose, of whom 6,000 are said to be in concentration camps in Germany—are forbidden by the tenets of their societies to take part in war. They are members of the Kingdom of God and must be free to give their witness. Yet, even so, there are differences in what they are prepared to do. A few are ready to take non-combatant service; some to undertake ambulance or other humanitarian work voluntarily, but not under compulsion; others, curiously enough, would not take it voluntarily, but would if ordered to do so, because they wish to "honour the King" as well as to "fear God."

Among the Free Churches, both the Methodists and the Baptists have given careful consideration to the question in Conference and have issued reasoned statements both for and against pacifism. They leave their members free to make up their own minds, but the Methodists incline to pacifism, and 700 of their ministers are said to belong to the Methodist Peace Fellowship, whereas the Baptists, though they, too, have a Peace Fellowship, incline in the other direction.

The Church of England has made no authoritative pronouncement on the question, though there is an Anglican Peace Fellowship and individual Anglicans, like Canon Sheppard, who started the Peace Pledge Union, have had an influence

which extends far beyond the boundaries of the Church. In many cases, men who have been brought up in the Church but did not find in it sufficient guidance for their conscience in this matter have joined other bodies where they could find something more explicit. In some instances High Anglicans guide themselves by the principles of the Roman Church in regard to war, which do not consider it wrong to undertake military service, but demand the fulfilment of five conditions for a "just" war; most of these urge that the fifth condition, which requires humanitarian methods and equipment is not fulfilled in the present war.

The Roman Church, too, has its Pax Fellowship, to which some of the applicants belong.

A certain proportion, but not a very large one, of the objectors on religious grounds take up the attitude of "non-resistance," some apparently believing that if a nation offered no resistance, the mere fact would disarm the enemy; others, that even if nations were overrun and subdued, yet in the end love would triumph over hate and good over evil. But for the majority the fundamental axiom is that war and Christianity are incompatible.

NON-RELIGIOUS GROUNDS

The objections on moral and humanitarian grounds are more difficult to assess, but question and answer usually elicit a satisfactory conclusion as to the genuineness of conviction. Here again the main objection is to taking human life, but there is apt also to be a wider moral objection to conscription in any form as an interference with the rights of the individual. Some of the University students write in their applications elaborate dissertations on philosophical grounds, such as "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," but usually on interrogation it appears that their reasons are really simple.

The greatest difficulty of the tribunal lies with political objectors. It is often found that their objections are really not to war in general, but to *this* war. Thus a Communist will refuse to take part in what he describes as a "Capitalist" or "Imperialist" war, though he would be ready to fight in a "class-war," while a Fascist will have no objection to war in general, but could not take part in a war in which Great Britain, instead of maintaining an "autarchic" isolation, is concerning herself with the affairs of continental Europe. Such objections a tribunal cannot admit, but the members of this tribunal have decided after long consideration that it is possible that a political objection should be held with such intensity of conviction as to constitute a conscientious objection, and have in a very few instances acted upon it. A Socialist, for instance, who rested his claim on the solidarity of the interests of the working classes, but also declared that he would never take part in class-warfare, was held to have a political objection which was in fact moral.

ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF WORK

Reference need only be made in passing to the difficulties experienced by the tribunal in specifying work for those conditionally registered. Where a man is engaged in work which clearly has some national importance, he has usually been ordered to continue in it, often with a strong recommendation that he should voluntarily seek some ambulance or A.R.P. work, if his conscience did not object to it. In other cases he has been told to seek work in agriculture or forestry with the help of the officials of the Ministry of Labour and the case marked for review at a later date.

SUMMARY OF IMPRESSIONS

If one is to attempt to sum up one's impressions, the outstanding conviction as the result of the hearing of many cases

is that of the undoubted honesty and sincerity of the applicants. Only a very few appear to be "shirkers," sheltering under the disguise of conscientious objectors in order to escape; these are of course replaced on the military register. The tribunal has always required that applicants should either bring a witness to testify to his sincerity or letters from persons acquainted with his views; these have given striking evidence, often stating their personal disagreement with the attitude taken up and not infrequently that they have tried in vain to use persuasion. A surprisingly large number of applicants have themselves given practical evidence of their sincerity by their action in giving up their jobs when the firm by which they were employed undertook war-work; not a few of these stated that they had since been unemployed, having been rejected by employers on the ground of their objection to military service. Many again, who were unable to take com-

batant service, were eager to be posted to the R.A.M.C., or even to mine-sweeping, being obviously ready to share the dangers of the combatant forces.

The problem of pacifism and the conscientious objector—at any rate the religious objector—arises, as Dr. Oldham has so clearly pointed out, from the tension between the religious beliefs of a Christian, who must regard himself as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, and the obligations incumbent upon a member of an earthly society. This is a tension which exists in many other spheres than that of the issue of war and peace—the "Brethren," for instance, take no part in political life and do not exercise the franchise. But it is for the most part latent and few men recognise its influence on their own lives or those of others. It is then to the good that the problem of the conscientious objector has brought this tension into prominence, for it is the true spur to all Christian effort.

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